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In this issue...

Bear: Adoption Number 1,000 1
Charlie the Devil Dog Gives Up Aggression 2



The Perfect Dog: A Lab & A Grateful Family 3



This Is No "One-Trick-Pony" 4



Alex & Ginger: Retrievers Live Golden Years as Veterans' Home Therapy Dogs 6



Toby to the Rescue 7
The Last Word 8

PUPPIES FOR PAROLE

Newsletter for the Puppies for Parole Program - Missouri Department of Corrections - Public Information Office

Adoption of Bear marks program's 1,000th dog JCCC handlers train Bear as service dog for woman in Colorado

When Ashley Gee was 12 years old, she was in an accident that changed her life forever. During a family vacation in Moab, Utah, Gee was driving an ATV when the throttle stuck. The four-wheeler drove off a canyon, taking Gee with it. She fell 125 feet to the earth and had to be life-flighted to a hospital. Gee wasn't expected to live.

More than a dozen surgeries later and now 19, Gee beat the odds and lives on her own in Colorado Springs, Colo. Gee's grandmother, Janet O'Reilly, says it's a "miracle" that her granddaughter is alive.

Last winter, complications in Gee's lower left leg led doctors to amputate part of it. O'Reilly said that because of the pain, her granddaughter hasn't been able to use a prosthetic. Gee gets around in a wheelchair or with the use of crutches.

Aware of the Missouri Department of Corrections' Puppies for Parole program, O'Reilly decided to see if it would be possible for the program to have a shelter

dog trained especially for her granddaughter. Jefferson City Correctional Center's dog program agreed, so O'Reilly and her granddaughter started searching JCCC's partnering shelter for possible candidates. O'Reilly's friend in Houston, Mo., went in person to the shelter—Dogwood Animal

Shelter in Osage Beach—to take a look. The woman picked out a 2-year-old German shepherd mix named Bear.

Gee said as soon as her grandmother started describing Bear to her, she knew he was the dog for her.

Bear has been in the program for two months. He has learned the basic obedience and social skills Puppies for Parole teaches all its dogs and has since moved on to learn the skills he will need as Gee's service dog.

His offender handlers say Bear will make a good service dog because he is focused, patient, loyal and non-aggressive. His main

handler said Bear will learn to fetch items on command, so Gee won't have to bend over to pick things up off the floor.

Bear will also be able to switch lights on and off, carry items for Gee, help her to

Bear's handler trains him to work with a harness, so he can be a service dog for his new owner.



➤➤➤ Bear page 4

DEVIL DOG Gives up aggression for affection

When Charlie's handler first got a look at him, he immediately saw why Charlie was referred to as "The Devil Dog."

The small Shih Tzu came out of his cage bearing his teeth, snapping at everyone and everything around him. Out of about a dozen dogs brought to Potosi Correctional Center (PCC) that day to start their term in the facility's Puppies for Parole program, Charlie was the only one brought to the offender handlers in a cage.

Linda Sharpe, coordinator at K9 Rescue and Rehab, put on thick rubber gloves to remove The Devil Dog from his cage to meet his two new handlers. Her hands and arms already had Charlie's mark on them—plenty of bites and scratches.

Charlie had come to PCC's partnering shelter, K9 Rescue, as a "breeder release." Too old to suit its breeding needs any longer, the puppy mill that had Charlie dispensed of him. He had had no significant human contact, and it showed.

"Nobody had ever touched him, played with him, interacted with him," Sharpe said. "There was no loving care or social interaction."

When Charlie felt scared or cor-

nered, he would turn aggressive.

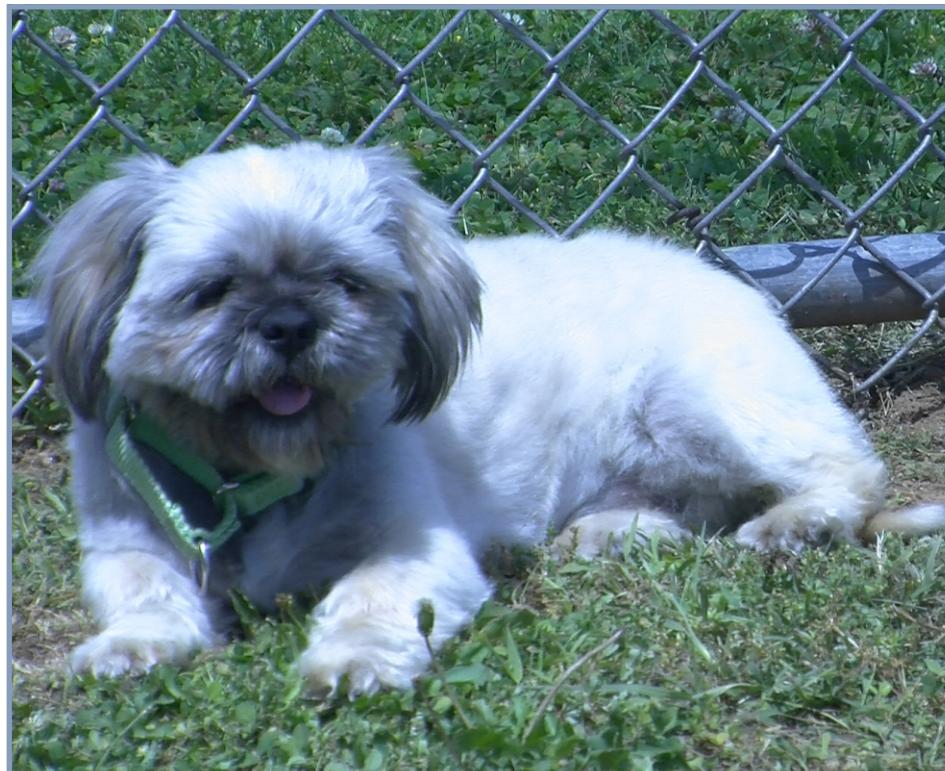
"He would come at you with everything he had, thus the term 'Devil Dog,'" Sharpe explained.

The shelter decided to enroll The Devil Dog into Puppies for Parole, so he could obtain the socialization he direly needed. His handlers knew they had a challenge on their hands. At first, Charlie was aggressive with any human or dog that came near. He was also underweight—weighing only six pounds—had a matted

interested in toys or treats, his handlers found that affection was Charlie's desired reward during training.

He was taught to sit up and beg to be picked up, to heel on and off the leash, to sit and stay, and other commands in order to pass the Canine Good Citizenship Test.

Charlie's biggest obstacle was overcoming his aggression toward other dogs. Through some tips from a book by Cesar Millan—the man known as "The Dog Whisp-



Charlie relaxes at Potosi Correctional Center. He was first known as "The Devil Dog" because of his aggression.

mess of hair, and had suffered broken bone injuries in the past.

Charlie's handlers and trainers decided to handle him as much as possible, to give him the attention he'd been neglected during the first years of his life. It worked. Not

erer"—Charlie's handlers taught him to stop biting other dogs. Eventually, he learned to play nice.

Kay Malloy, PCC function unit manager and volunteer with Puppies for Parole, said Charlie became a "completely different

>>> Charlie page 5

THE PERFECT DOG

Large Lab finds forever home with grateful family

From the moment Crystal Kelch saw Hunter's picture, she was sure he was the one.

With two young sons, Kelch knew she wanted a "kid-friendly" dog she could trust with her boys. She'd had small house dogs before, so she was looking for a well-mannered, large dog her sons could play with outside. Kelch visited many kennels only to come away disappointed; she couldn't find what she was looking for.

Then she went to the Northeast Missouri Humane Society (NMHS) and saw photos of dogs in the Puppies for Parole program on the wall. The photo of Hunter—a 2-year-old, yellow Labrador mix—caught her eye. She was convinced this was the dog she'd been searching for, so she filled out adoption papers. However, she had second thoughts after she was told how hyper Hunter was when he was first brought to the shelter as a stray in November 2011.

Kurt Groenda, administrator at NMHS, said Hunter had a good demeanor, but "was a little bit on the wild side." Hunter joined the Puppies for Parole program at Northeast Correctional Center (NECC) in January.



Hunter cuddles with 18-month-old Kasen as he sleeps.

When he first entered the program, Hunter wanted to do things his way and on his own time. His offender handler said he never showed any aggression but lacked socialization skills, as he didn't want to play with the other dogs.

Roxane Gaston, Puppies for Parole assistant coordinator at NECC, said Hunter didn't trust people or other dogs and was "broken-hearted." Gaston said that through the program, the Lab "came out of his shell and learned to be a social dog."

"His heart mended and he could trust again," she said.

Not only did Hunter learn the necessary social and obedience skills he would need, but he was the first dog in NECC's program to master the highest level of the Canine Life and Social Skills test, earning him a "doctorate" in the program.

All Kelch's concerns about Hunter's behavior were put to rest when she went to NECC for a "meet and greet" to see Hunter in person for the first time.

"We were so excited to meet a well-mannered dog that was completely trained," Kelch remembers. "It was amazing to watch all the dogs perform with their handlers.

THIS IS NO 'ONE-TRICK-PONY'

When Phil first arrived at the Farmington Correctional Center (FCC), he was 30 pounds underweight. Despite being underfed, Phil was full of energy, and the staff and offenders at FCC quickly realized that the border collie/black Lab mix was extremely intelligent.

Phil was brought to FCC's partnering shelter as a stray. The offender handlers noticed that Phil seemed bored upon first arrival, because he would run up and down the fence line trying to keep busy. They decided to put him to work at the prison.

Pam Wiles, case manager at FCC and Puppies for Parole volunteer, said Phil's handlers worked really hard with him, teaching him all sorts of tricks.

"They had him doing some really amazing things," Wiles said.

Phil learned to switch lights on and off, open and close doors, bark on command, take a bow, play dead, and even take out the trash.

When Hazel Leggans heard about Phil's abilities, she thought he would be a good fit for her family. Leggans has a son who is visually-impaired and asked if Phil could learn two more tricks that would be helpful for her son—find the TV remote and fetch the phone. The offender handlers stepped up to the task, and after his training was completed, Phil went home to his adopted family in March.

>>> Phil page 7

“Phil has been trained so well by offenders ... he really helps all of the members of our family.”



Phil, an intelligent Lab mix, learned various tricks at Farmington Correctional Center before being adopted.

BEAR

stand up, heel to a wheelchair, and walk with a harness.

O'Reilly said Gee has wanted a dog for a long time.

"Not only is this dog going to be a service dog for her, we also expect it to be her companion and help her through everyday life," O'Reilly explained.

Gee plans to attend Bear's graduation from the program on Sept. 25 and bring him back to Colorado with her. She admits that she's extremely Bear will also be able to switch lights on and off, carry items for Gee, help her to stand up, heel to a wheelchair, and walk with a harness.

O'Reilly said Gee has wanted a dog for a long time.



Bear learns to retrieve items on command.

"Not only is this dog going to be a service dog for her, we also expect it to be her companion and help her through everyday life," O'Reilly explained.

Gee plans to attend Bear's graduation from the program on Sept. 25 and bring him back to Colorado with her. She admits that she's extremely excited and can't wait to adopt him into her home.

"I love my puppy more than anything, and I haven't even met him yet," Gee said.

With the adoption of Bear, Puppies for Parole celebrates reaching a landmark for the program—1,000 dogs adopted and given a fresh start in life in their forever homes. 

ALEX & GINGER

Retrievers Live Golden Years as Veterans' Home Therapy Dogs

Some might say that Alex and Ginger are past their prime, but the residents at the dogs' new home would not agree.

The two senior dogs, who no one showed any interest in adopting, have found their niche with about 200 of Missouri's veterans. The Missouri Veterans Home in Cameron adopted both dogs through the Puppies for Parole program at Crossroads Correctional Center (CRCC).

Alex, a yellow Lab/golden retriever mix, was welcomed into the veterans' home first. He spends his days roaming the three open communities there, as well as visiting bed-ridden veterans for pet therapy. He has his own bed in each community and has free reign of the open communities, showing affection to veterans and letting them take him for walks outside. He didn't always have it so good.

Alex was within an hour of being euthanized, because of his age, when he was rescued by the



Ginger, left, and Alex reside at the Missouri Veterans Home in Cameron as live-in therapy dogs.

Cameron Animal Shelter to be enrolled into CRCC's dog program.

"If it wasn't for Puppies for Parole, he would not be here today," said Mandy Pettigrew, Puppies for Parole volunteer at CRCC.

Pettigrew said Alex always showed excellent behavior at CRCC.

"He loved the attention—the attention he got from offenders and staff," she said. "He's just absolutely a people dog."

However, finding Alex the right home, at first, seemed improbable. Not only was his age a hindrance, but he was also on medication for his joints. However, when the local veterans' home showed interest in adopting a dog, it was decided Alex's calm demeanor and laid-back attitude would fit perfectly there.

Darci Henry, director of recreational therapy at the home, said Alex adapted so well to his environment that the home decided it wanted another dog for its Alzheimer's/dementia community.

CRCC's program had received a golden retriever, Ginger, that was very well-behaved but wasn't having any luck finding a home because of her age. Ginger visited the veterans' home's closed community several times to make sure she could handle the stress of the unit and see how the veterans responded to her.

>>> Alex & Ginger page 7

CHARLIE

dog" after a few weeks in the program.

The Shih Tzu once known as The Devil Dog "became everybody's favorite," she said. "He'd go

right up to anyone."

Charlie's hair grew back—it had to be clipped short when he first arrived—and he put on nine pounds during his stay at PCC. The now well-behaved, lap dog

went to his forever home looking and acting like a new dog. He was adopted by a family in the St. Louis area and Sharpe reports that he is doing wonderfully, even snuggling on the couch to watch sports. 

Toby To The Rescue

Toby to go from rescued to rescuer

Addy Vinyard saw something special in Toby from the very start.

The Dutch shepherd mix couldn't sit still. He was full of drive and energy.

"He just wants to go all the time," Vinyard said.

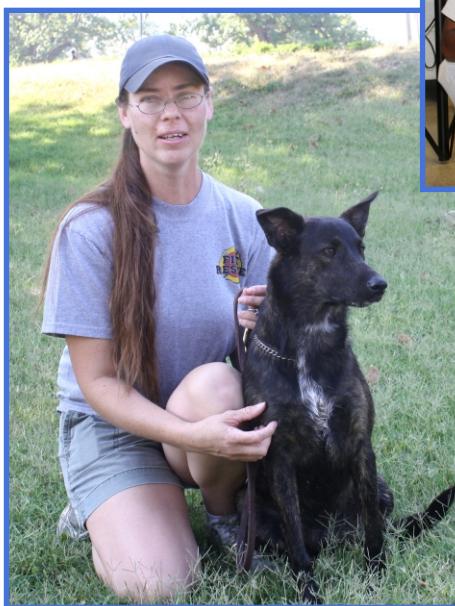
Vinyard is a volunteer trainer for the Puppies for Parole program at Algoa Correctional Center (ACC). When she worked with Toby, she saw more than just a pet, she saw a search and rescue dog.

Vinyard decided to give Lynn Ann Ballard a call to see if she might be interested. Ballard is a canine handler with Missouri Task Force 1. The task force is one of 28 FEMA Urban Search and Rescue teams in the country. With her certified search and rescue dogs, Ballard responds to disasters and calls from law enforcement agencies across the U.S.

Ballard said Vinyard's timing was right on, as she plans to retire one of her trained dogs soon and needed a replacement. Ballard said the timing of Vinyard's call was the first sign Toby was the dog for her.

The second sign came when she brought Toby to her home in Williamsburg for a weekend visit. Ballard took Toby through a series of tests to see how he might perform as a search and rescue dog. His constant excitement and energy that some pet owners might find wearing were just what Ballard was looking for. Toby had no problem passing the tests.

One of tests Ballard gave was to see how Toby did when she threw a toy up on a mountain of concrete rubble. She said even seasoned dogs sometimes hesitate when pre-



Top: Toby poses with his offender handler during his graduation ceremony at Algoa Correctional Center.

Left: Toby sits with Lynn Ann Ballard, his new owner.

sented with such a task, but Toby forged right up the rubble without pause. Ballard also noted that Toby was the right size, age and temperament to become her next rescue dog. She sees him as one of the dogs that will go in after disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes or earthquakes to search for survivors amongst the rubble.

Toby's road to becoming a trained and certified search and rescue canine will be a long one. Ballard said it usually takes about two years and each dog has to pass several tests to be certified.

"He has some growing to do," Ballard said, "but he's already way above where they usually start."

Toby passed his Canine Good Citizenship test at ACC, where his offender handler said he is happy things have come full circle for the

former stray. His handler explained that Toby was rescued from the shelter and now Toby has the chance to rescue others.

Not only did Ballard see the timing of Toby's adoption and his performance on her tests as signs he was the perfect dog for her, but the

final sign was when Garrett Animal Shelter in Fulton waived the adoption fee. The shelter decided there would be no fee, because Toby was being adopted for search and rescue.

Each of Ballard's search and rescue dogs were abandoned dogs that she took in.

She says, "There's a lot of nice dogs out there that people just don't pay attention to because they're shelter dogs." 

PUPPIES FOR PAROLE

1000th
adoption

Missouri Department of Corrections

PERFECT

You could tell so much time and effort was put into these dogs."

Kelch's family brought Hunter to their home outside of Perry on Feb. 27. They thought they were going to have to keep such a big dog—Hunter weighs about 80 pounds—outside at all times. But Kelch said her family was so impressed with his behavior that Hunter stays indoors except when the family is away.

"We have him outside during the day while we are gone, and we have never come home to him missing or in the road," Kelch said. "He does not chase cars. Basically, he is a perfect dog."

Hunter never shows the slightest aggression, even when Kelch's 18-month-old son, Kasen, climbs all

over him every evening. Kelch's other son, 10-year-old Blake, uses Hunter as his outfielder and catcher when he practices baseball.

"We knew we had chosen the right dog from day one," Kelch relates. "Hunter quickly made his way into all of our hearts."

Hunter was the first dog Kelch's family had ever adopted. They've been so pleased with him that they plan to adopt another dog through Puppies for Parole soon.

"I think the program is wonderful," Kelch said. "It gives dogs a second chance, and it gives the offenders an opportunity to give back to the community. I would recommend Puppies for Parole to anyone that wants a dog." 

PHIL

Leggans says that not only has her whole family taken to Phil, but Phil has adopted them as well.

"Phil has been trained so well by offenders from the Farmington Correctional Center that he promptly responds to commands when given, and he really helps all of the members of our family," Leggans said. "Phil is a constant companion and service dog to our son who is visually-impaired."

Besides performing all his assigned tasks daily, Phil

also plays catch, Frisbee and goes for walks in the park with the Leggans family.

Leggans said Phil will fetch the phone for any member of her family, which she believes could save a life in the event of an emergency. She also appreciates that he is patient with her grandchildren and will even help them pick up their toys and place them in the toy box.

"Phil has been a wonderful addition to our family," Leggans said. 

ALEX & GINGER

"In the end, she was perfect," Pettigrew said, "She proved herself."

Henry said sometimes when a resident is anxious or upset, staff will call Ginger into the room to help the veteran calm down. Residents may also call Ginger into their room to sleep, or they may take her for walks in the enclosed garden area.

"She is very sweet, and instantly has a positive impact on those she comes in contact with," Henry said.

Henry explained that both Alex and Ginger do pet therapy almost every day. She said the nonverbal veterans will smile and interact more when the dogs are around than they do at any other time. 

“THE LAST WORD”

What I Think About Puppies for Parole...

What I think about the dog program can be summed up in just one word, ingenious. I mean think of it, how else can you teach one who was or has been labeled by society as “incorrigible,” the true meaning of responsibility without subjecting them to a hands-on scenario?

In all honesty, I must admit the dog program has helped change my mindset and actions in so many ways. For example, before I entered the dog program, I was only out for myself. Now, being a dog trainer and having to be responsible for someone other than myself while I'm doing time, teaches me that there is more to life than just me. I've learned through interacting with these dogs that they aren't just animals being trained to be pets, but they are living, breathing, caring beings who have about as much sense, if not more, than the average human being. And they've had about as rough a time in life as I have. I've come to realize they have lots of love to give, and, in return, they need love, too.

Yes, I'm now a more compassionate person; now more so than I've ever been. These dogs have taught me how to care for someone other than myself. They've taught me honesty, integrity, and true care and concern. Above all, they've taught me how to be responsible. I sometimes wonder honestly, who's training who?

I've had many experiences in my lifetime so far, but none as educational and rewarding as being a trainer in the dog program at Algoa. Spending time with these dogs has taught me that I can change, that I can make a difference in life no matter how small the acts or accomplishments may seem to others. Each dog that I spend time with, I get to know and love, and each new trick that I teach them and they learn, I feel more proud of them than I do of myself. And after awhile, one can't help but to form a bond with each dog. Once they graduate, I know it's time for them to move on to a place that they will finally get to know as home, which I think they all so rightfully deserve to have. It's strange to say it this way, but most of them I'm proud to see graduate and leave. At the same time, I'm sad to see them (my friends) go.

At first, I signed up for the dog program in the hope of having my participation recognized by the parole board, but now I've found a real purpose in teaching the dogs, as well as having them teach me. All in all, I think the dog program is very enlightening. Above all, it's a very ingeniously well-thought-out rehabilitation course, because when you're doing time, what better way could one possibly have than to devote a significant portion of his otherwise unprogressive time doing something that has an “everybody benefits” outcome? The offender learns responsibility, and the dogs learn discipline and house-training. Plus they get a home. It's a win-win all the way around.

—Offender at Algoa Correctional Center